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Fannie Newton Moragne (interview no. 1)

Interviewer: Megan Coe

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Q: Can you please tell me about your childhood and where you grew up?

Moragne: Predominantly I grew up here in Baltimore. I was educated in public schools. I went to William Alexander School #112, then to junior high school, and from there to Douglass High School — graduated in the Class of 1942.

As a child, I was interested in music, drama, dance, athletics, and participated in all those activities.

Q: In what ways did you participate, especially music?

Moragne: Well, I was in an elementary school that did operettas and plays and drama all of the time because we were known as a platoon school. We moved around from class to class and had different teachers. The music teacher was Elmira Miller, who was a tremendous influence, not only in childhood, but right through my life for many, many years.

We did all kinds of children's musicals of course. And we're still speaking of childhood, because I haven't gotten to junior high school or senior high school yet.

So musically I guess that's about what I did, except that I did have piano lessons. I studied with Caroline Johnson Dugan — Duggin. Now you see I'm forgetting for a moment. Because she became Caroline Cole later in school, but I knew her by Duggin. Thank you memory, thank you God! Caroline Duggin was her name.

I also was involved with music and of course with dance. Because we used all of the classical music for our dance recitals and concerts. Marsh Calloway's wife, Julia, was our accompanist for our concerts. We did some of the concerts at the Lyric Theater at that point in time.

Sheldon Hoskins was my dance teacher. And, of course, music all became involved with him because we did all kinds of dancing: Toe, tap, ballet, Spanish, modern dance, interpretive dance. We didn't call it modern at that time. It was interpretive dance. We did all of that.

Earl Bostick's wife was sort of my dance teacher prior to going to Sheldon Hoskins. And just a word about Sheldon: He was taken into the Metropolitan Opera as a dance teacher years later, but did not survive because he was quite ill at the time they took him. But he was a tremendous dancer. He was also very instrumental. See you're asking me about music, but it all revolves around many things for me because he was instrumental in my doing a lot of theater and drama work. He was a drama teacher as well as some of the others I had at that time.

Q: And where exactly in Baltimore did you grow up?

Moragne: In Northwest Baltimore, around this area and Gilmore Street, the eleven hundred block of Gilmore Street. And sometimes the sixteen hundred block because my grandmother lived there. I was jostling back and forth from one place to the other many, many times because my granny and I were good friends. And many times we would be going out together different places. I might be spending weekends with her.

Q: Did you have siblings?

Moragne: No brothers, no sisters. My father died when I was fourteen months old, and my mother chose not to remarry until I was just about, well, I was a young adult. I was at least sixteen when she remarried. She did not believe in children of different parents. That's not exactly how she said it, but she did not think that siblings from different mothers and fathers got along too well, and she preferred my not having them. That's the reason I got from her anyway.

Q: Then once you were in middle school and high school, how did you evolve musically?

Moragne: I immediately went to the operatic, music section in high school. We'll skip junior high school because there wasn't too much going on there. I mean, I did have a good teacher, but nothing much was happening with music. But when I did go to high school, I immediately went to the music and drama coach, and we did a lot of operettas. Llewelyn Wilson was his name, and I think he taught most of the children in Baltimore who went to Douglass High School during his time anyway.

Q: Then after high school?

Moragne: Well, for a while I didn't do anything because I had not decided to go immediately into college. But my church was having a talent show, and everybody was clamoring for me to be on this talent program, and I didn't have anything I wanted to do. They came at the last minute clamoring for me because they didn't have anybody for the show, I believe.

But anyway, I guess it's funny because I decided I'd go. I didn't have any music I wanted to sing. Out of everything I had learned, I decided I wanted to do a tenor solo. And so I grabbed a tenor solo from the last operetta we had done at high school, and I really don't remember

whether it was *Conchita* or whether it was something else. I don't think it was *Conchita* because that was a Spanish thing, and this was not a Spanish piece.

"You're the girl I'm longing." See, bringing back things that I haven't thought of for years and years and years and years. Anyway, I went to that talent contest, and I won it. And the prize was a scholarship to any school I wanted to attend. And it was a little late for me to get into school for that particular year. I had to get a lot of information gathered to go along with the Senatorial scholarship. So I did not enter college for another semester or so.

Where are we? This is the college.

Q: Yes.

Moragne: Well, I chose Howard University. And in a way I had wanted to go to Juilliard, but that was going to take me a little far away from home, and I didn't really have money for anything, to be absolutely frank. I knew that my mother and I could not afford Juilliard. I decided to stick with Howard, and I commuted every day by train to Howard.

That was very interesting. We didn't have money sometimes to ride the train. I don't know if you want to know all of this or not.

Q: Anything about. [Laughter]

Moragne: Well, sometimes the conductors would be very nice, and they knew we were going to school, and they would just kind of permit us to get on the train. We don't have a ticket. We didn't get a chance to get a ticket this morning. That's okay. And we would get on the train and ride. And other times, we would really just change tickets from one student to another. Take a book and go up the aisle and pass the conductor and give our train pass to someone else to use.

Now that's terrible, but that's what we had to do. We did not have funds to do all of these things. Many times I walked to the train station. I lived in the six hundred block of Fulton Avenue. And at that time I was little older and had moved from the area that we lived in, but it was still northwest Baltimore. And I would walk sometimes the six blocks from my home to the train station because I didn't have money, five cents, to ride downtown to catch the train. I'd just get on at the station, the sub-station, and ride from there to Washington.

And then that wasn't the end of the tale. Because when I got on the other end, I wouldn't have money to ride from Washington Station to Howard University sometimes. And, oh, you'd have to know how far that was to walk! I never counted the distance, but I have walked from that station in Washington, D.C. all the way to Howard University campus. I would go a back route because I was ashamed to tell the other students I didn't have money to ride the bus. Because if we had to stay for concerts that evening, I needed my ten cents to get a cup of coffee and a couple slices of toast.

And so I found my way to Howard by walking one street over from the main car line. And that would take quite a bit of energy because it was quite a few miles from the station to school. But I made it. I'm still here. I'm not well, but I'm still here.

Q: And then when you were at Howard, what did you study and who did you study under?

Moragne: All right. Well, we had to have a full music course if we were going to graduate as music students. I was a voice major, piano minor. I studied pedagogy, solfege — don't do this to me — composition, harmonic analysis, everything that the School of Music would offer. We had to take liberal arts subjects as well. We didn't get by those very easily.

Madeline Coleman was my theory teacher, one of my very good ones. Evelyn White was another exceptionally good theory teacher I had. And I can't forget a good friend, a student teacher, who was also studying at that time, Henry Kindlam, who later accompanied me many times on concerts. He's a Russian fellow who had started school later in his life, but he was an excellent musician — fantastic. He could do anything. And I think I, as well as every other student who wasn't a piano major, learned as much from him as we did from our teachers most of the time.

Q: Now, while you were in college, were you performing?

Moragne: Oh, we were not allowed to perform when we were in college. That was a professional thing. Now I did do some, well I guess you'd call it volunteer work. But that's not the name they gave it. I can see a picture of me now, a soloist for the blind association. I worked for handicapped things. But it was not for pay.

Q: And then once you graduated from college, what did you do then?

Moragne: One of the first things I did — ah, let me tell you a second thing I did. I don't know whether it was first or second now. [Laughter] Things jam all up together. I can't really remember whether I went on a goodwill tour first or whether I started teaching at Baltimore Institute of Musical Arts first. They both ran sort of simultaneously together, and I probably was doing one and the other one at the same time.

Q: Why don't you tell me about the goodwill tour?

Moragne: Okay. The goodwill tour was a three thousand mile tour of the United States. Somehow or other I had connected with a gentleman in Camden, New Jersey, who had a very small group. It was about seven or eight. And we had a nice big town car that we drove all over the United States — to sing in churches predominantly. I think sometimes that he was making up the schedule as we went along. I don't think we really had a schedule, even though he had promised us money. And it was a goodwill tour because I did go for nothing. [Laughter]

I really didn't get any money going; I didn't get any money coming but it was an

experience, traveling all through Texas in the tumbleweeds of the desert and everything because the roads, the highways, were not like they are now. I can recall several times being caught in

big, heavy sand and rain storms when we would have to just pull over and stop because they had no lights. There were no highways like they are now.

And it would be rather frightening, nothing but the lightning flashing, and the thunder would be devastating. Many times we stayed in people's homes. That's why I don't think too many things were pre-arranged as I'd been told. And they were looking for places for us to stay.

Some of that tour was pretty interesting. We would come into places with nowhere to go to get meals or a change of clothes. We would go into their city halls, but, of course, the men — there were three men with us, the driver, another male singer and the leader — they would go in to some of these places to look them over first. And they would be too horrendous for them to take the females into. So then they'd have to drive around in the various communities until they found something in the colored sections of town. Maybe someone had businesses there, and they would allow us to come in and use their facilities in order to get ourselves washed and dressed to perform for wherever we were going to be performing that night.

Sometimes eating was very difficult. We would go in places, and they didn't want to feed us because we were not white. Many times they would send me before them to get food. I had nice beautiful hair at that time because I didn't have thyroid and kidney problems which have changed all of that. And the big earrings and everything. Especially around Texas area, they didn't know whether I was Spanish or Mexican or not, and so I would be accepted in to get food for us.

If I stayed in too long and someone came to find out how things were going and they realized I was with other colored people, then they didn't want to give us the food. I remember two days eating nothing but Lifesavers while we traveling through Texas.

I was very belligerent about a lot of it because I didn't know prior to that time that I wasn't white. I didn't know it was a difference — not that I thought I was white. I didn't know there was any difference in us because I had grown up in a culture with my mother having been from — well, she was a Baltimorean, but she was reared in New Jersey and she didn't suffer all of the prejudices. So when she came back here I was purchased — born, purchased [laughter] — when I was born, she tried to keep me from as many bad situations as she could. And she did.

Now I'm going to reverse for a few moments because she used to take me to the Lyric Theater when we were not permitted to go to the Lyric Theater. She would just call and order tickets and have them hold them at the box office, and she'd go down and pick them up, and we would go in. Now, we couldn't afford to sit anywhere but in the balcony, but we would sit there. And there would be people who would move during intermission because they did not want to sit next to us. I never could understand. I'd say, Mom, why did they move? What's the matter? And she'd say nothing honey. There's not a thing wrong with you. There's something wrong with them so that's why they moved. And I'd say, oh, okay.

So I really didn't understand and realize what was going on. Well, as I said, I was at least about twenty-seven before that whole realization struck me dead in the face. But that's still another story.

Q: Okay. So then you said you taught?

Moragne: At the Baltimore Institute of Musical Arts. This was the old WFBR radio station at Lanvale and Fremont Avenue. I had met Herman Schwartz. Well, I met him through the Taubmans for whom I worked while I was in college on occasion, some weekends. The Taubmans owned auto stores in the city, and they used to have me come out. It was very funny because I didn't know anything about housework or anything, but she would still allow me to do work. Then she realized that I was in college and had other skills. I would sometimes become her personal secretary and write letters to her friends for whatever time she wanted to use me.

Otherwise, I was running around telling the help what to do, and I didn't know what to do. Mrs. Taubman says that you are to clean such and such a room and change the linens and whatever. Well, anyway, she was friends with the Schwartzes. But anyway, she invited them to dinner, and then she had me sing for them. He immediately asked if I would like to teach at the school and do private voice teaching.

I really did not want to be a teacher, not in school situations. I had had simultaneously some substitute work at Harvey Junior High School. It wasn't a very nice experience. The guys were larger than I, the girls were larger than I. Even in those days there were some little smart alecks that you had to deal with. And when I found myself dealing with one quite firmly one day, carrying him by the collar to the principal's office, and telling her that I would not work there any longer. I could not tolerate the foolishness that they thought they could get away with with the music teacher. They couldn't do that with me. Maybe with some, but I wasn't one of that group! And so I never went back to teach there again.

And so I only had the job at Musical Institute at that time. I taught a rather good student there. In fact, one young lady was bringing her sister, and I found out that she could play the piano. She was thirteen years old. She was an excellent pianist. She could sight read anything she saw. I said, wow, I can't do this. So I'm going to take you under my wing. I didn't tell her that per se, but that's what I did. I began to teach her and coach her in how to accompany a singer, and she, several years later, accompanied me many times around the city when I sang. And her name was Audrey Cyrus [McCallum]. I mean, she's one of the young people you'll probably be interviewing. Not you, but someone else, later on.

And then there was Junetta Jones who always lived in my studio. She's also somebody that you're probably going to be interviewing. Junetta made her home there in my studio when she did not have class. She learned most of my music, and used it, utilized it from time to time in her concerts later on in her life.

William Meyers was another one of my good students, and for years he taught at Dulaney Valley High School and had a group called the Young Americans. God, why didn't I review any of this? One of the best students, and most well known, would be Jimmy McDonald — James McDonald — but Jimmy is what they called him as he went on. He seemed like a very arrogant young man. He knew everything! Why are you coming to me? You hardly want to listen! But he was listening. I found out later he was really listening to all of my instructions in voice.

But he had a God-given voice that I had nothing to do with. He sounded like a twenty-five year old man at fifteen, when he first came to me. He did not want to study the music I was giving him. He would go to the library every week and come back, singing something that he had heard from other artists' records. And I'd say, Jimmy, why do you do that? You're going to ruin what you have. Let me teach you and get your voice stabilized before you begin doing things like this.

Well, he didn't follow my advice. But during the summer, when we were not working, he went to work for a Seventh Day Adventist organization, and they found out he could sing. He also had an opportunity to rescue some children. Up in Pennsylvania they had a big flood and he rescued some of the children from the camp who were caught in this big storm and flood.

The Seventh Day Adventist group adopted him and took him away to sing. He went away with them that very next day. He came back and told me in his bold twenty-five year old voice at seventeen that he was going to leave me and go and sing for them. I said fine. And he did very well with them.

He went on from them. I'd come home from work sometimes and turn my TV on and there would be Jimmy. He was with Billy Graham, touring all over the world with Billy Graham. I don't believe this. I later found him on Katherine Coulon's program. He was worthy. He had the most beautiful voice. From there, some years later, he went to sing with Benny Hinn. I never heard him sing with Benny Hinn. At any point in time when I would be in audiences where Jimmy was, and I was on several occasions, he would always let the audience know that I had been his first voice teacher.

Now where were we before we got thrown off? [Laughter]

Q: At the Institute, you were a voice teacher for them. Were you involved in the administration at all?

Moragne: No. I wasn't involved in most of the other things that they did because the Institute did not last too long. The government took their funds away from the school and because most of the students were veterans — most of them, not all. That meant they didn't really have enough funds to operate. But then those students came home to me, and I began to home teach the students that I had had at the Institute, along with some others.

Q: Around what year did the Institute close?

Moragne: Somewhere around 1952, about a year or so after I went there. Could have been '53.

Q: So then after you were at the Institute, what did you?

Moragne: Well, I had a big accident which took me off the concert stage.

I had just started doing some concert work, and Dr. Strider from Morgan State University, as well as Dean Schwartz, were constantly looking for things for me to do in New York and other places and the accident prevented my doing it.

I broke my double ankle bone. I was off the stage for two years and not even on crutches the whole two years because in the beginning I was in a cast. So I had to be in bed this most of the time.

That took me right out of a lot of the things that I thought I was going to be doing. I lost contacts that I thought I had and would have had. They don't wait for you.

Again, Dr. Strider was instrumental in trying to do things for me, and so I did a big festival at Morgan State University, it was college then, with the symphonic orchestra and the choir. Dean Schwartz took me to New York to audition for Metropolitan Opera Company — this was like six months after they had accepted Marian Anderson. They didn't want to see another one of us. They didn't have another show for another one of us — not an opera, not an anything that we could do.

And that literally broke my heart. [Laughter] I literally did not want to do anything else at that time. Although I had other auditions in New York at that point and later, I auditioned for Eubie Blake — and strange to end up with my picture in his facility downtown [The Eubie Blake National Jazz Institute and Cultural Center].

Q: Oh that's neat. I'd like to see that.

Moragne: But Eubie wanted me to do something I couldn't do because I'm not a blues singer. I was a lyric soprano with dramatic qualities but he still wanted me to try. He gave me music to bring home to learn. I never looked at it — didn't know who he was from Adam's house cat at that point in time.

I never found out until around 1990, which was some twenty, thirty years later, who Eubie Blake was. I may have pursued something a little more diligently, but I didn't. While I was in New York with the Met audition, I also had another audition which had been arranged by my husband. We never got into anything about that, but that's good. He's not a part of this. [Laughter]

His aunt had arranged for me to have an audition with Adolph Zucca. And I went to that audition. He had rented little Carnegie Hall for our audition. I met with the accompanist fifteen minutes prior to our audition, and zipped through the music — I do this this way, and this this way, and do this. But, anyway, it was great. He came in and I had no problems. He wanted me to go abroad and sing.

That's where my problem came. I had two children by that time. I did not tell him anything about the children. It wasn't like just picking up and leaving like that. He wanted me to do three months of study with someone at Peabody whose name I don't remember. I haven't been able to remember that person for years.

But I mean it was all so traumatic. I think I just wanted to divorce myself from it to keep from dying internally — physically and mentally. I didn't have the money to afford to go to study with this person, and my pride would not allow me to go to him and tell him I didn't have the money



to study. I didn't have anyone else to go to to say I need x number of dollars. I didn't even know how many dollars I needed, to study with him for three months.

And Mr. Zucca wanted me to do more coloratura type work because he heard it in my voice, even though I loved the lyric dramatic things that were there. But he heard other things that he wanted cultivated. I did not pursue it, much to my chagrin over the years. My mother didn't want me to go away anyway. She was dubious about flying, and how was I gonna get to Europe.

So I had to give up on it and then she gave me a very guilty conscience. After all, I had these children and they were my responsibility. I should not be leaving that at that time because they were reaching the age when they would be going in high school and maybe ready for college.

I had struggled a great deal trying to make headway in the music field, and it just wasn't happening. If I had been a pop singer or whatever, I probably would have made it. Early on in my young life — and I didn't tell you about that — just about every week at the Royal Theater. I had worked for some of the big bands at that time and I had been asked to go with one when I was about twelve or thirteen years of age — Jimmie Lunceford's. Of course, my mother put her foot down on that too.

I was too young to be on the road with anything like that. So I naturally didn't get to do that, which did not bother me. I wasn't worried. I did have some other things come up evolving around that later on in my life. I just decided I wasn't going to fight this game any more. It wasn't for me. When people would ask me to come and sing, I would turn them down for the simple reason I had worked hard for what I had, and I felt, like any doctor or any lawyer, I should be paid.

They didn't have money to pay for me and an accompanist. I didn't have time to come to sing at a tea to entertain. That was not my idea of what I wanted to do. I wanted to do concert work, and that was not it. Entertaining was off the table for me when it came down to that.

I did some concerts before all of these things that I've told you occurred. But again, they were in churches. I used to go every year and work with the choir at Lincoln University. It was a boys school, and I would go there to work with them. With Orrin Sutherland.

But whatever I did, I had a full rich life of it, and I can't at this point bemoan the fact that I didn't get on a concert stage. I've sung in Town Hall in Philadelphia, as well as in Carnegie Hall in New York. I sung there with the Herman Schwartz chorale. That all came out of the school, the Baltimore Institute, because he had a chorale group there. He asked me if I would go along and sing.

I was a soloist, but I didn't sing with the group. I just had my own segments of the program. That's down at Eubie Blake too, except that they had the pictures of the people who were singing, and didn't photograph the back of the picture where the program was printed. A lot of people have told me they have gone there looking for my picture in the program, and it wasn't there. Well, that's because I didn't sing with the group. That's why you didn't see me photographed with them.

Okay Megan, it's your turn. [Laughter]

Q: Okay. Actually, I have another question. The Baltimore Institute. I know it ended, you said it ended in the —

Moragne: Early '50s.

Q: Was it affected by Peabody, I'm not sure exactly when Peabody started letting "Colored" students attend?

Moragne: It wasn't too long after that that Peabody began to let students in. Because they began taking all of my students, and I was kind of furious. Even the high schools then began sending students. Some of the high schools were sending students to me, and later they then began to send the students to Peabody thinking that they would get more credit for what they were doing than they would have coming to a private home and studying. So yes.

As a matter of fact, Jimmy went to Peabody, and he told me all the teachers that they were amazed and told him that I had done a terrific job with him. There was really very little that they could have done for him, one way or the other. He knew how to breathe, he knew the aspects of singing, and he knew everything except that he was arrogant and knew what it was God was telling him in his head, what he wanted him to do, and we didn't know that.

But yes, Dorothy Wilson went there. Junetta Jones went there. Even Audrey Cyrus went. All of this after the school closed, a couple of years later. I don't know how they were influenced. I don't know how that went about. I was not an inquisitive person to that extent. But I do know that they took my students.

Hazel Bryant was another one of our very good students, and she went to New York and did well, working with a performing arts program there. She was the daughter of John Bryant at Bethel AME Church. She came to the school on scholarship. Professor Schwartz and someone else and myself went to audition the young people who were maybe to be given a scholarship and she happened to be the lucky one to get it.

He had a choice of another person. Someone with a very high, light, fluffy, funny little voice, but I said no, that's not the voice. She has a pretty voice, but take Hazel because she's got a voice that will be easily trained, and there is something there to work with. So that's how Hazel got the scholarship with us.

But, yes, that's a good possibility, and I had not really thought about that. They did take our students once the government took their assistance away. I don't know whether they were sitting around waiting, or whether they had already had eyes on the situation. I don't know they came about doing it, but they did get our students.

Q: Oh, the people that we've talked to, much of their singing, their musical expression was through their churches. Did you have a religious life and how did that affect your music?

Moragne: Well, they tell me I could sing before I could talk. My mother always said that. And when I began to talk, I was singing, asking for whatever I wanted in song. [Ms. Moragne sings]. But I don't know anything about that.

I know that I was taught French very early on. That has nothing to do with what I did in church. I did sing in church with our church choir. We had a children's choir, but I didn't do too much of that. I really didn't sing much with the senior choir later on. Just occasionally, now and then if they needed a soloist or something, I might chip in and help them out.

But I hate to say it like that because I am a very devout Christian. It's just that I couldn't really mingle my voice with some of the voices that were in the choir for the simple reason that they had not had training. They weren't breathing along with me, and I'd end up with a sore throat. Because it's like anything else that's weak. You can pull it right along in your direction. And so my voice, even though it was strong — they say it was a soaring voice — but if I'm singing with a whole group of people who are singing incorrectly. I hate to say that of church, but anyway, it's true. They were not all breathing at the same point in time, and I had been used to doing that and phrasing. So it was very difficult for me to sing or want to sing with the church choir.

I did have the opportunity with one of our ministers who wanted me to train the choir vocally. But we never really got down to business where that was concerned. He wanted me to give all the choir lessons.

Q: So as an adult, I know you said you kind of gave up on really —

Moragne: Singing.

Q: Yes. Later on, did you still have music in your life?

Moragne: Listened. Well, I have sung with the One Voice Choir Martin Luther King, Jr. celebrations for a couple of years. Just a couple of years ago, because I really would not normally have done something like that. But one of my friends, a young lady whom I had trained very briefly, asked me if I would go there to help them out. I said, okay. It'll give me something to do musically.

And when our church was having its annual concerts and music workshops, I'd work with them with those things. I wasn't a complete snob, but it wasn't something that I really looked forward to or relished doing.

Q: Were you involved in Park Bands?

Moragne: Oh yes. Oh, I sang with the Park Bands all the time. One of my biggest jobs was to sing with Park Bands. I can show you all of that stuff — and gobs of that.

Q: And around when was that in your life?

Moragne: Maybe starting around '53, '54. All of these things, you know, fall in together. When one thing stops, something else seemed to crop right up.

As a matter of fact, speaking of the Park Bands, what's his name? Earl Foreman, and I'm looking at him too. The Sun Paper sponsored a talent search, music concert or something so that he could get some concerts for the parks in the summertime. I wasn't doing professional singing. I told you my college would not have permitted my doing that, just going out singing to make money. So since I wasn't a professional, I had had the accident with my ankle, and had lost those opportunities, I said, I may as well try again. This is my other effort in between giving up.

So I applied for that contest. I guess a hundred and sixty-five people tried out, and something like about eighteen or twenty of us were chosen. And that group got to go to sing in the different parks throughout the summer. Then it came down to a smaller number. We got a lot of publicity. I think the biggest thing I got out of that was that Allen Byrd at the Sun Paper had been told by Skitch Henderson that of all of the people that he auditioned at the end of the contest, that touched them because they kicked me out of the top three places and they gave them to three whites. And everybody who came to the big, final concert at Memorial Stadium, oh so many people of all races and nationalities, came to tell me how much they had loved hearing me sing, and that the people who were winning should not have won. That did nothing for my ego. That just made me go down, down, down.

It was kind of demeaning for me, I guess, because there wasn't anything I could do about it. And Mr. Foreman told me, well, Fannie, you don't have to worry. Next year when we have this program again you'll be sure to be one of the top winners. I said no I won't because I won't be here. If I wasn't good enough this year, I won't be good enough next year.

And, of course Ada Jenkins [Ada Killion Jenkins, Music Critic for the Afro-American Newspaper] knew about Allen Byrd at the Sun Paper having told me what Skitch Henderson had said. I wasn't going to that final concert, and I told her. And she said don't do that. Don't let your pride stand in the way of your going and taking the honors that you were due. And I said okay, then on your account I'll go. I had gone to the beach that day. I was so disillusioned. I didn't want to have anything to do with it. I had gotten really nice and dark, stayed in the sun. But after talking to her, I decided well, okay, I'll just get dressed and go.

That's the picture that they have down at the Eubie Blake with Roberta Peters giving me my award.

But, yes, I did a lot of work with all of the different Park Bands, white and black. Of course, after the contest, I was working with the white bands as much as the black. But otherwise I was with the black bands in the different colored neighborhoods.

Q: Were the experiences very different between the Park Bands, between the white ones and the black ones?

Moragne: Not necessarily. The musicians were great either way and there was not a difference there.

Q: What was that experience like?

Moragne: Well, it was always a dress up occasion for me, and I would always have to go and rehearse with the bands a couple times prior to the concerts. And we did them sometimes outside, and sometimes in the old Douglass High School. And the colored choir might also be featured at that time, and they would sing. The funny thing about all of this is that when I worked with the Department of Recreation and Parks, I came across all of the colored music.

Everything that they had was labeled for us because I handled it all: colored or white, black, whatever it was, I had the whole music part. When they asked Mayor [William Donald] Schaeffer if I should take over the whole area (Stephanie Asworthy was the music supervisor for the parks for the summertime), when that began to fall apart because we didn't have funds, our director asked Mayor Schaeffer if I could take it over. For some unknown reason, with all the work I've done for Schaeffer, he said an adamant no. He was going to leave it with Stephanie Asworthy.

Now, of course, I realize that he and her husband were very good friends, and he and I weren't. [Laughter] I only worked for him, but I did a lot of work for him with funds for Arts for the Neighborhood. I've worked with the Maryland Arts Council, mainly on the music segments and things.

Q: When did you do all of those things?

Moragne: In the '60s, '70s.

Q: What else did you do around that time?

Moragne: I was on the board of Pumpkin Theater for about ten years. I had also been on the board of Children's Theater Association, CTA. I was their executive secretary for three or four years with Patty Potts. So I guess I engulfed myself in other things that I knew as opposed to just the music and the singing. Because when I began to work for the Department of Recreation and Parks, that was one of the stipulations — that I couldn't sing.

Now I could sing at Christmas time to entertain. But I think somehow or other they were afraid I might jump out and do something else and leave the department, but I wasn't going in that direction. I still had my two children, and I had to look after them. I was a responsible person, and, therefore, if they didn't know it by all of the work that I did, I wasn't about to tell them. Oh, no, and I wasn't going to sign any papers for them saying that I wasn't going to leave, but I had no plans for doing that.

I would have had to have everything right in my hands before I could have done that. Now, if Mr. Zucca had come along at the point in time when they were telling me I couldn't sing, that would have been a whole different story.

There was a point when I was really ready to go away and close down shop. Close down shop, I mean my home and everything. My boys were the age where I felt like that they were about to

take care of themselves. One was just finishing high school and one had already gone on to college. We had gotten together and decided that it would be all right for me to leave them. They would be able to manage on their own. It wasn't going to be like that three thousand mile good will tour. They were all right about it, but my mother wasn't and so I just said okay.

So I've decided since my mama has passed that she was my assignment. All of us have an assignment, and I said God did not intend for me to go away. I had to help take care of her. She was my responsibility also.

Q: Is there anything else you can think of about music and your life to talk about?

Moragne: Well, I was very much influenced by Ellis Larkins. And I know you all have him on your list as well.

Q: Yes.

Moragne: Ellis and I used to be in the operettas together. And many times Ellis would save me from getting spanked because I would stay at school studying and rehearsing. And I'd say, Ellis, you gotta go home with me cause my mother's going to kill me when I get home. And so we would go home, and he would sit down and play the piano, and I would sing.

Later he began to give me piano lessons as well. But somehow or other we were friends and I could not study with him. It was a play situation. If I'd do something wrong, he'd say oh, okay, it's all right — but it wasn't all right. But that's how I would take it until finally I said, well, I think we just have to stop trying to, you have to stop trying to teach me music because I'm not going to learn from you like this. I enjoy your playing, and when I make a mistake, I just go to pieces.

I'd do the same thing in college. If I'd make a mistake on the piano, my hands would come right off. Oh boy, but I had a rough time with piano! But somehow or other I managed to get around that monster. And at the end of my term, we had to take finals before all of the faculty, no matter what their areas of study were, but especially piano and voice. And my teacher was so afraid I'm going to mess up on the piano — and rightfully so — but anyway, she was standing there, turning pages, pointing to where I was because I was crying throughout the whole ordeal. When I finally finished, every one of the teachers stood up and applauded, which made me feel really good that I had accomplished that because I was a nervous wreck.

Anyway, I've enjoyed music along the way, in all of its aspects. I have a son who's very appreciative of music. He calls me, constantly telling me different things he remembers. He's become quite a voice critic, and he'll listen to the opera. Mother, are you listening to the opera today? No. Well turn it on because I want to know what you think about such and such a voice. I say, well, okay, and then he would give me his opinion. I'd say why are you doing this? Why have you become such a critic? He says, Momma, I used to listen to you teach. I know what you told your students, and I know how you taught them.

The birds used to sing. I had a bird. And if somebody came in, especially students with beautiful voices and those who were really doing well, that bird would sing its little head off. Its name was Jerry. He would sing away. So when Jerry died, I could not bury him, I left him on the piano in a little gold box for a couple of weeks. And finally Dr. Strider said to me, would you like for me to bury Jerry out at Morgan State University on the campus? [Laughter] I said, you can do that? He said, yes, I can do that for you. And I said, well, then please, you can take him and you can bury him for me.

Q: So Jerry's buried at Morgan.

Moragne: So Jerry's buried somewhere, I think, on Morgan State campus. I don't think Dr. Strider would have done otherwise. I don't think he would have thrown him away.

We had tenants living in our home at that time and there was a little girl about two or three years old. When Jerry would start singing, and my student would start singing, she would come to the top of the steps, and start singing. [Ms. Moragne makes a screeching noise]. [Laughter] But no she was really trying, she was doing better than that.

There was something else that had crossed my mind, but that's what it did. It crossed and went away. Let me think a minute. I was trying to see if it would come back.

Oh, I still attend the operas at the Lyric Theater because music is still the love of my life, even though I don't do a lot of singing anymore. Right now they're pursuing me for the operas, and I've already told you about my physical condition. So I'm probably not going to be able to go to the opera this year. And that is a love of mine, and I would watch them on television when they're on because I don't care for other types of music that much.

Classical music, oh yes. But whatever they're doing now, I don't consider it music and I certainly don't care for rap or things like that. And yet it's strange because I came from a background in my early, early days, in my ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen year old area when I was singing at the Royal Theater, and I liked popular music. I had started at one point, and I didn't tell you that Erskine Hawkins had wanted me to sing with his band. I told you about Jimmy Lunceford. But I was in college when Erskine Hawkins ran into me at one point. I had been in the Baby Grand, I guess it's a bar, club or something, and I didn't frequent those, but I had a friend who was playing there in New York, and I decided to go and hear him play, and he had me singing. And, of course, I was singing classical music because I didn't know anything else to sing, but everybody liked it.

Anyhow, we came later on that evening into a situation where Erskine Hawkins was in the audience, and he heard me sing, and he sent someone over from the bar to ask me to sing *The Lord's Prayer* and *Ave Maria* — one or the other, or both. And when they came over, I said what drunk wants to hear me sing *The Lord's Prayer* or *Ave Maria* in here. But anyway, I obliged because Larry — I can't remember his last name — but Larry had told me, oh no, it doesn't matter, just go ahead and sing it. And I did. Then the drunk at the bar wanted to talk to me. I don't want to talk to anybody at the bar. And the lady said it's Erskine Hawkins. He's not drunk. I said, what! So I went over to the bar and talked to him for a while. He wanted me to sing and

work for him immediately. And me without a dime in my pocket, not a nickel to ride the bus to get to the train, from the train station or to the train station! I looked him in his face and told him no, I don't like your kind of music. [Laughter] And he said, but you can sing anything you want to. I said but your music is too loud and too raucous for me. A loud, ferocious kind of style as far as I was concerned.

Six months later I was in my automobile, probably going toward New York for some reason or other, and heard this beautiful music and this young lady singing, obligato, like a coloratura. Wonderful! What's that? When the announcer came on, he said it was Erskine Hawkins and this girl. I said, I don't believe it! He took my voice and found somebody who could do something similar to it to put it to his music because he heard it and that's what he wanted to do. And he did it! I could have made five hundred dollars a week at that time, this was back in the '40s. I don't believe me!

Anyway, I think I was true to what I wanted to do. And that, to me, was important. I wasn't wishy washy, go with every wave and everything that came along. It had to be very special, whatever it was I was looking for. Maybe I never found it, or maybe I found it and never knew it.

I think that's enough.

Q: Okay. Great.

END OF INTERVIEW